WASHTENAW HISTORICAL SOCIETY—Founded December 19, 1857

Washtenaw Impressions

SEPTEMBER, 1974

WHS Members are Invited to State Conference

The 100th Annual Meeting of the Historical Society of Michigan will be held at the recently dedicated Bentley Historical Library at the University of Michigan October 17-19. Ann Arbor has been chosen as the site of the meeting since the city is celebrating its Sesquicentennial this year. Many activities of a historical nature are being planned to commemorate this event which relate directly to the activities and programs of the Society. the WHS will hostess the reception desk on the 18th and 19th.

Highlight of this year's meeting will be a tour of Ann Arbor's Historic Architecture and a tour of historical libraries on the U-M campus. Friday's tour of Ann Arbor will be conducted by Kingsbury Marzolf of the Ann Arbor Historic District Commission and Wystan Stevens of the Ann Arbor Sesquicentennial Commission. The tour will be preceded by a presentation by Marzolf on "Ann Arbor Architecture in Historic Perspective." The tour will be followed by a reception at the home of U-M President and Mrs. Robben W. Fleming.

Thursday's library tour will take the participants to the William L. Clements Library, the Department of Rare Books and Special Collections in the Graduate Library, and the Bentley Historical Library. A reception at the Bentley Historical Library will follow this tour.

Ride Anybody?

If you do not drive after dark, or for any other reason need a ride to the regular monthly meeting, the society will provide transportation. All you have to do is phone Frank Everett at 663-5723 and he will arrange for a fellow member to pick you up.

Recent Gifts to Society

A number of gifts including both cash and property have been made to the Washtenaw Historical Society in recent months. Cash gifts include $25 from Frank Everett, $25 from Ralph and Lydia Muncy and a $50 bequest from Miss Hildegarde Heusel.

Edward L. Wisner of Manchester has made a gift of four books of the minutes of the Southern Washtenaw Farmers Club of 1879.

Lois Hopkins made a gift of numerous books, records and data on the early Bird Hills development, as well as early day clothing and high school documents.

Thanks to Fred Schermer for the donation of a year's supply of paper for the "Washtenaw Impression." Thanks to Drury-Lacy for the typesetting of this publication and to Ann Arbor Federal Savings for the keylining and printing with a special thanks to Laurie MacKenzie for her efforts.

Notice of Special Meeting

A special meeting of the Washtenaw Historical Society membership has been called by the president, Hazel Proctor, for the purpose of determining whether the society should acquire a site for a museum. The meeting will be held in the Liberty Hall of Ann Arbor Federal Savings, Liberty Street office, on October 1, 1974 at 4:00 p.m. This meeting is called to comply with the society articles of incorporation, and approval is necessary to go ahead with the museum plans. All members are urged to attend.

Fall Membership Drive Under Way

With the opening of our fall membership drive, we would like to enlist the help of the society members. If you know of anyone who might like to join the society, call Harriet or Tom Lacy at 663-5098, or, better yet, bring them to a meeting. A mailing of one thousand letters will be sent to prospective members this fall in the county.

Geneology Section Schedules October Meeting

"Present plans for the October meeting are to have a symposium or discussion about sources of information," said Ralph Muncy, chairman. "Particular emphasis will be placed on sources in our locality, the County Clerk's records, Probate Records and the Register of Deeds."

Other resources to be discussed are libraries and what help can be obtained from other researchers.

"Information often turns up in the strangest places. Examples which have helped us may be useful to the rest," Muncy further stated.

Additional details can be obtained by phoning Ralph Muncy at 663-3761.

Four WHS Members Named to County Historic District Commission

Dave Osler, Harold Jones, Stuart Thayer and Lydia Muncy, have been named to the County Historic District Commission. This commission has been set up to further the preservation of things historic within the county. Lynda Eberbach and Ray Spokes have been active for many years in urging the creation of such a commission. WHS is pleased to have been a part in its establishment.

Muncy and Proctor Renovate Barn

A break in the foundation of the Toumy barn which threatened the safety of the building has been sealed off thanks to the brains of Ralph Muncy and the brawn of John Proctor.

When interviewed, Ralph Muncy had this to say, "The cave under the Tuomy Barn has been sealed off at a price of $17.73 plus considerable sweat and some discomfort (bee sting) on the part of John and a job which may not be a credit to my "professional" reputation."

Editorial note: We do not have a report on which part of Proctor was stung.

Washtenaw Historical Society: 117 years of searching for a home

The following article by Hazel Proctor will appear in the Michigan State Historical Society Commemorative Chronicle. Subsequent issues of the Washtenaw Impressions will contain reprints of the speech from the previous monthly meeting of the society.

Last August 16, over two hundred members and guests of the Washtenaw Historical Society met at Hudson Mills park for a gala celebration of what they thought was the 100th anniversary of the Society's founding in 1873. However, a few months later, Wystan Stevens, unofficial county historian, discovered that the Washtenaw Historical Society had actually been founded in December, 1857. So, instead of being 100 years old we were 117 years old. According to Frank Wilhelme, Director of the Historical Society of Michigan, this probably makes us the oldest historical society in the state, at least in a strongly embedded spirit, if not in unbroken continuity.

Washtenaw County was only thirty years old when nineteen citizens of Ann Arbor issued a call "for a county convention, for the purpose of forming a County Historical Association." The call stated that these citizens, "being anxious that the history of Washtenaw County might be transmitted to those who may come after us, and feeling it a duty incumbent on us to unite with our fellow citizens in other parts of the county in securing an object so desirable and worthy of our efforts, hereby issue a call for a county convention, to be composed of as many as are disposed to meet us in such a convention, from the townships in the county, to be held at the Court House in the City of Ann Arbor on Thursday, the 17th day of December, 1857, at 12 o'clock, M., for the purpose of organizing a Washtenaw Historical Society."[1] The minutes from that convention reveal that Mr. John Geddes "was called to the chair, and J. M. Wilcoxson appointed secretary." It was resolved that a committee of one representative in each township of the county be appointed "to awaken an interest in the towns." A committee comprised of one representative from each township plus the city of Ann Arbor, was formed to draw up a constitution. On

Hon. John Geddes, familiarly known as "Uncle John Geddes" throughout the length and breadth of Washtenaw County, called for the founding of the Washtenaw Historical Society in 1857.

January 13, 1858, the group met again in the Court House in Ann Arbor and completed its organization. The constitution was adopted, and officers were elected. The Honorable Munnis Kinney of Webster Township was elected president. The object of this original county society was "to collect and preserve the history of the first settlement and growth of Washtenaw County, and to publish the same from time to time, as shall be deemed advisable." The Vice-President from each township was encouraged to form an auxiliary society having the same object in view. There was to be an annual meeting of the county society each January. It must be noted that no women participated in this inaugural meeting, although they may have participated in the smaller township societies. There are records of various meetings being held through 1862, and the *Michigan Argus* reported the annual meetings. However, alas, there are no further records in the *Argus* or other county newspapers, for approximately eleven years. There is reason to believe the organization continued to exist and to collect artifacts and manuscripts for a number of years, but the bleak period of the Civil War apparently sapped the interest and energies of the population.

It may be assumed that when the state legislature passed a resolution in April of 1873, calling for the collecting and preserving of historical information relating to Michigan, the Society decided to reactivate. In fact, John Geddes, one of the earliest settlers in the county, and the person who called the original convention to organize in 1857, was among those who reactivated the society in August 1873. The organization was renamed the Washtenaw County Pioneer Society, and another constitution was adopted with specific objectives "to cultivate social relations, collect and preserve biographical sketches and historical facts and reminiscences, and transmit the same to future generations." Although women were admitted to membership in the Society at this time, restrictions required members to have been residents of the county for at least twenty years, and to pay 25¢ as an annual membership fee.

The first president of the newly organized Washtenaw County Pioneer Society was Alpheus Felch, former Justice of the State Supreme Court, Governor of Michigan, U.S. Senator and Law Professor at the University of Michigan.[2] In 1876, when the Society was incorporated under state law, membership requirements changed and only those who were at least forty years old and who had been residents for twenty-five years were admitted. But in 1929, the Society realized that its "pioneers" were getting fewer and fewer, so the age and residence requirements for membership were dropped and the name was changed to Washtenaw Historical Society. The emphasis on the preservation of published material of the county was broadened to include the preservation of "relics."

Alpheus Felch—Governor of Michigan, 1845-1847. He became the first president of the Society when it was reorganized in 1873.

Over the years, priceless articles belonging to the earliest settlers were given to the county society for preservation for future generations. These articles include the surveyor's chain used by John Allen in 1824 to lay out the city of Ann Arbor, Ann Allen's fan, early scientific instruments, farm implements, carriages, wagons, sleds, wooden bicycles and skates, paintings, furniture and clothing. This memorabilia, among which is Washtenaw County's first piano, provided the nucleus of our present collection of artifacts gathered over a span of one hundred and fifty years. Housing this large collection has necessitated some makeshift moves. Books, manuscripts and photographs have, for the most part, been placed in the custody of the Michigan Historical Collections, an arrangement which will be continued, as well as the Society's present policy of loaning items to various historical displays throughout the county. There are five active local historical societies in Washtenaw, and several outstanding town or village museums housed in restored structures, libraries and public buildings. The Ypsilanti Society has restored an 1860 residence for its museum. Ann Arbor restored the "Kempf House", a lovely example of Greek Revival architecture, and the city is in the process of restoring a circa 1842 cobblestone farmhouse as a farm museum. Nevertheless, the majority of objects in the large collection of the Washtenaw Historical Society are in storage, waiting for the establishment of a county historical museum. The need for a permanent county museum was first expressed by Will Gregory in 1874, and today, one hundred years later, it is close to becoming a reality. Plans are being formulated by the Washtenaw Historical Society to purchase several acres around a historical site to create a "working" museum complex. Plans call for a main display building, auditorium, and craft classrooms in separate structures. A log cabin built in 1874 will be moved to the site, restored and furnished, as well as a one-room schoolhouse where teachers may bring their classes for actual classroom study. In addition, future plans for the complex include a grist mill, cooper's shop and blacksmith shop where students and visitors may learn trades of yesteryear. The present collections for the museum represent the past 150 years of life in the county and include relics from early Indians and traders who inhabited this area. After 117 years of collecting and planning for a county museum, the 1974 membership of the Washtenaw Historical Society is ready to turn the dreams of John Geddes, Alpheus Felch, William Gregory, and all the other early members of this Society into reality. The Washtenaw County Museum will be built in the very near future.

[1]*Michigan Argus*, November 27, 1857.

Chapin Piano—Brought to Washtenaw County by ox cart in 1827—Potawatomi Indians danced to its tinkling music while 12 year old Lucy Chapin played.

Early surveyor's instruments including John Allen's "chain & links" used to survey Ann Arbor.

Stuart Thayer To be Speaker At October WHS Meeting

The Circus is coming to town . ... reawakening memories of the excitement, the clowns, strange animals, and happy moments from the past. CIRCUS HISTORY will be the subject of the October meeting on the 24th, with RINGMASTER Stuart Thayer. The Big Top will be pitched in Liberty Hall, Ann Arbor Federal Savings. Show time 8 p.m.

Mr. Thayer, a member of the Society, is also one of a small band of circus enthusiasts organized to record circus history. He has a book on the subject in preparation. Recently, Mr. Thayer was appointed to the Washtenaw County Historic District Commission.

Washtenaw
Historical Society
Meeting
September 26, 1974
8:00 P.M.
LIBERTY HALL
ANN ARBOR FEDERAL SAVINGS
LIBERTY AT DIVISION
Guests Invited

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